

10 February 2005 Press Conference Transcript

See Opening and Closing statements attached (Both BG Carmony and BG Wade).

Mimoza Zajmi of RTK: *General, last month in some news, I mean crisis groups have warned of new riots in Kosovo. Do you have any indication of this and are you ready to respond, any kind of solution to March of last year?*

BG Tod Carmony: We see no signs of violence in the spring. We think most people understand it's not in anybody's interest to have a reoccurrence of violence. KFOR and the civilian police force are very well prepared to deal with anything that may turn up.

Driton Ramadani of Radio Ferizaj: *Yesterday, I got information, that in your sector, namely in some villages around Kacanick, there's some houses that were searched. What would your comment be on this?*

BG Carmony: Our task forces occasionally conduct searches when they have reason to believe that there are weapons or other threats to the safety and security in that particular area. I have not seen the results of what happened yesterday.

Xheladin Rexhepi of Zeri: *General, during November, there was an attempt on somebody that left a very bad impression on the local population. Unfortunately, a member of KFOR was also wounded. There was material damage, up to \$6 million Euros. The explosion was a very sophisticated device. These days we expect Ben-Af to open again for customers. However, unfortunately, there are indications that it's going to be bombed again. What do you think, how secure are the investments here in Kosovo, such as the investments in Ben-Af? Thank you.*

BG Carmony: I think over the last several years, we have seen a continual improvement in the security situation here for businesses in our sector. The Ben-Af bombing was a very unfortunate incident and is still under police investigation at this time. I know that the local police are aware of these public threats and I'm sure are taking measures to ensure the security of the store, as is the management. Other than the Ben-Af bombing, we have not had any significant disruptions to the businesses here in our sector for the last six months. So I think, for the most part, investments are pretty secure here in our sector.

Jasmina Stockovic of TV Most: *A question for General Carmony. In your opening statements, you mentioned your successes throughout your time here. And due to the fact that you emphasize your concern for the welfare of everybody. I'm curious, have you ever attempted, throughout your mandate here to find out, if the owners of the land, some of the owners, the Serb owners of the land where Camp Bondsteel is currently located, that they have been expelled out of Kosovo in 1999 and are currently located in a collective refugee centers throughout Serbia. Would your conscience be a little at ease, now that you're leaving, had you known? So that those Serbs can now return, **perhaps** not at this same land, but at some different land that will have been allocated. Thank you.*

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BG Carmony: I assume the question is whether we are providing compensation or would provide compensation to Serbian land owners who have property claims under Bondsteel?

Jasmina Stockovic of TV Most: *Not just the compensation. Have you ever attempted to contact these people? Their property has been arsoned and they have nothing. If they wish to return here and live again, that's one of the standards. Whatever have you achieved in terms of this question?*

BG Carmony: Many bad things happened here in Kosovo in '98 and '99 and there are numerous meritorious property claims against various parties. The American government has set up a claims process where people can present claims for property. We have received a number of property claims and have processed them while we have been here and currently many land owners of land under Bondsteel are receiving rental-type payments or payments for use of the land. I do not have all the information here, however, my PAO would be happy to provide a short summary of what's been done during our rotation.

Selim Maliqi of Radio 24: *Almost in every press conference, the municipality of Kamenica is mentioned, which is taken as an example, whether it's regarding the realization of projects or a minimum of standards. However, there's one very troubling issue – We are a poor area and smuggling is a very serious issue, especially with livestock. How can this phenomenon be prevented and what is the cooperation with KPS?*

BG Carmony: You are correct. There is a problem with smuggling and we're aware of the fact that cattle are one of the primary things that comes across the ABL. Early in our rotation, we conducted a successful break-up of one of these smuggling rings and the individuals and the le were turned over to KPS. KPS continues to work on these issues and their competency becomes better all the time. So, we would expect that this issue will slowly go away as the police get better. KFOR and General Wade's people will continue to work that process with the KPS and the Kamenica municipality.

Bota Sot News: *First a question for you and then for General Wade. You mentioned the newly-formed agency for property compensation. Will this agency take care of Albanians who suffered during the war? Because, as it's well known, there are about 50,000 Albanian homes that were destroyed during the war. What's your comment on this?*

BG Carmony: The property claims that I was talking about had to do with property under places like Camp Bondsteel and Camp Monteith, near Gnjilane. So, I apologize if I made it sound like that was a broader organization. So, the basic process is, the claim can be presented with documentation of land ownership and all the appropriate credentials to the property office. We do some basic processing of them here and then they're forwarded to another office where there is a final determination made and a level of compensation adjudicated. But these have to do with claims strictly with land that places like Bondsteel occupies, or if one of our vehicles, or soldiers creates property damage

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here. Socially-owned entities, of which over half of the land under Bondsteel is a socially-owned entity, cannot be compensated by the current regulations. I covered this process in some detail at a recent radio interview and I'll have my PAO put out the text of that and some additional information so you can understand a little more clearly what this process is.

Demush Zefaj of Bota Sot: *General Wade, since you are here now, this time, when there's lot of talk about potential violence, have you increased the number of soldiers here, or actually decreased it?*

BG Wade: As General Carmony said earlier, I bring the exact same number of forces with me that he currently has.

Vllaznim Jakupi of TV Liria: *I have a question for General Wade. I was impressed by the general's opening statement when he mentioned the events of last March. Do you have a recipe to deal with events like last March? Do you have a recipe to fight the tension and the economic insecurity in Kosovo?*

BG Wade: I don't think anybody has a recipe for a situation such as what happened last March. What Task Force Falcon does bring to Kosovo, are soldiers that have experience and skills dealing with civilian communities. That experience includes dealing with local and regional law enforcement agencies and that is where our strength lies to help them when they ask us for assistance. It is most important that all Kosovars have faith in and rely, on their own civilian police force, before KFOR. From what I've seen in my short time here, KPS provides that type of support. Thank you.

Jasmina Stockovic of TV Most: *Question for General Wade, but I would like to propose a suggestion to General Carmony. When one deals with the land compensation, the standards for Kosovo pre-supposition the return of the Serbs and not land buying. Mr. Wade, in your biography, it states...*

BG Carmony: Just a second. We are not buying any land, for instance, under Bondsteel. We are making rental payments in exchange for the use of the land. We had a complete camp, called Camp McGrath, over near Vitina. That camp is now completely gone and only grass grows there. Ok, so now you can ask General Wade your question.

Jasmina Stockovic of TV Most: *Your biography states an outstanding contribution in fighting the drug issue and the anti-terrorist war, the war on terrorism. And according to the information that one can get off the web pages, one can get information within and beyond regions of Kosovo, one imports or exports the drugs in the amount of \$1 to \$3 billion US dollars. And apart from this additional commercial enterprise, for I'm sure has a lot better information when it comes to arms smuggling. So, I'm curious if you're going to implement your wealth of experience in order to prevent or to make a stop to some of these illegal activities?*

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BG Wade: Drugs in any economy or any country, feed crime and destabilizes any legitimate economy. In the United States, the military's war on drugs is not unlike KFOR's duties here in Kosovo and that is that we support civil authorities and law enforcement agencies to fight drugs. Surely, any illegal drug activity through, or in Kosovo, enables crime and destabilizes any attempt at establishing a viable economy. Therefore, any support that my forces can provide civil authorities and KPS in the performance of our duties to ensure a safe and stable environment, we would do.